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REOPEN PURI JAGANNATH TEMPLE'S RATNA BHANDAR ON JULY 14: PANEL

The recommendation was made during a meeting on Tuesday, said the high-level panel's chairman Justice Biswanath Rath

VALUABLE ITEMS IN TREASURY TO BE AUDITED

"We have unanimously decided that the committee would request the government to reopen the inner chamber of the 'Ratna Bhandar' on July 14," said Justice Biswanath Rath, a retired judge of the Orissa High Court. The high-level panel was set up by the Odisha government to supervise the making of an inventory of valuable items stored in the Ratna Bhandar

LOCKS TO BE BROKEN IF KEY DOESN'T WORK

- The temple's chief administrator was asked to produce the duplicate key but he could not because the temple authority was busy with the Rath Yatra, Justice Rath said, adding that he has now been asked to submit it on July 14
- The meeting also decided to force open the treasury by breaking the locks if the duplicate key would not function for some reason, said Justice Rath

1978

THE LAST TIME PURI JAGANNATH TEMPLE'S TREASURY WAS OPENED WAS AS YES AND

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After Kathua ambush, fresh gunbattle in J&K's Doda

FAYAZ WANI @ Srinagar

A fierce gunfight broke out between militants and security forces in the mountainous Doda district on Tuesday, a day after the deadly ambush by terrorists on an Army convoy in Jammu and Kashmir's Kathua district.

A security official said an encounter broke out between militants and a joint contingent of Army and police at Ghadi Bhagwah forest area in upper reaches of Doda district.

"The security men had launched a search operation in the forest area after receiving inputs about the presence of militants there," the official said, adding: "We have got inputs that a group of 2-3 militants are hiding in a forest area."

Additional troops were rushed to the forest area to tighten the siege. According to reports, two militants were hit in retaliatory fire by the security personnel.

Meanwhile, officials said the National Investigation Agency will be assisting police in the probe on the Kathua ambush, which killed five soldiers — all of them from Uttarakhand.

A security official said a joint team of police, CRPF and Army is conducting massive searches in the forest areas of Machedi and adjoining areas in Kathua district to trace and neutralise the terrorists responsible for Monday's ambush.

Officials said the elite para commandos, who were air dropped in the area on Monday evening, are assisting the troops in the search operation. The Army is using drones to track down the movement of militants responsible for the attack.

"No fresh contact has been established with the hiding militants. The search operation is going on," said a security official. He added that the search operation has been extended to Basantgarh forest area of neighbouring Udhampur district.

Sources said during initial investigation it was found that three or four militants were involved in the attack on the Army convoy in Kathua.

Uttarakhand CM Pushkar Singh Dhami pays tribute to the soldiers martyred in Kathua, in Dehradun | PTI

Putin promises early release of Indians working in Russian military; ambitious bilateral annual trade target of $100 bn set for 2030

Russian President Vladimir Putin confers the award of the 'Order of St Andrew the Apostle' on visiting Prime Minister Narendra Modi, at the Kremlin in Moscow on Tuesday | ANI/PTI

PM: Bombs, bullets stymie peace push

YESHI SELI @ New Delhi

VISITING Prime Minister Narendra Modi emphasised in his talks with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Moscow that a solution to the Ukraine war cannot be found in the battlefield, adding efforts for peace do not succeed in the midst of bombs and bullets.

The talks came amid reports of a Russian cruise missile bombing a children's hospital in Ukraine's capital Kyiv. Modi said in his televised opening remarks at the summit talks on Tuesday, "Let's take war, any conflict or terrorist acts: any person who believes in humanity feels pain when people die, and especially when innocent children die. When we feel such pain, the heart simply explodes, and I had the opportunity to talk about these issues with you yesterday," Modi told Putin. He said both discussed Ukraine and other matters extensively for over 4-5 hours.

For his part, Putin said, "I appreciate the attention India has paid to pressing issues, which includes efforts to finding ways to resolve the Ukraine crisis primarily through peaceful means."

Later, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said, "Modi is not claiming to be a mediator" on Ukraine. The Indian PM, he informed, suggested proposals to end the war. But he doubted if the NATO grouping would consider Modi's peace initiatives.

In his opening remarks, Putin reaffirmed that Russia and India have a special and privileged partnership and that trade between the two countries grew by 66% last year and by 20% in the first quarter of 2024.

Putin also conferred on Modi the 'Order of St Andrew the Apostle' for his outstanding services in developing the strategic partnership between Russia and India. The award was announced in 2019.

In their bilateral talks, Putin agreed to Modi's strong demand for the early release and return of the Indian nationals working in the Russian military as support staff. Foreign Secretary Vinay Kwatra said the Russian side promised early discharge of all Indian nationals from the service of the Russian Army.

Modi also expressed concern over delay in the shipping defence spare parts. Meanwhile, India will be opening two new consulates in Russia — at Kazan and Yekaterinburg.

TASKS AHEAD

- Aspiration for elimination of non-tariff trade barriers on bilateral trade. Continuation of talks to liberalise bilateral trade, including possibility to establish EAEU-India Free Trade Area. Raising mutual trade volume to over $100 bn by 2030
- Development of a bilateral settlement system using national currencies
- Increase of cargo turnover with India through the launch of new routes of the North-South International Transport Corridor, the Northern Sea Route and the Chennai-Vladivostok Sea Line
- Increase of bilateral trade in agri products, food and fertilisers
- Cooperation in energy sectors like nuclear energy, oil refining, petrochem. Facilitation of energy security amid global energy transition
- Strengthening interaction in infra development, transport engineering, automobile production and shipbuilding, space and other industrial sectors
- Promotion of investments and joint projects across various sectors of digital economy, science and research, educational exchanges and internships for employees of high-tech companies
- Studying possibility of opening branches of Indian medical institutions in Russia

NDA vs I.N.D.I.A in first bypolls to 13 seats after general elections

PREETHA NAIR @ New Delhi

WITH the bypolls for 13 assembly constituencies to be held on Wednesday, the stage is set for another face-off between the NDA and the Opposition INDIA bloc in seven states.

The states that go to the polls are Bihar, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Madhya Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Punjab and Himachal Pradesh. Coming on the heels of the 2024 Lok Sabha results, the contest is significant for both sides. The results, which will be declared on July 13, will also be a curtain raiser for important state elections later this year.

The election to the four seats in West Bengal will be keenly watched as three seats fell vacant after BJP MLAs jumped ship to the Trinamool Congress (TMC). While the BJP is trying to leverage its Lok Sabha election leads in three of these segments, the TMC is harping on its recent electoral success. The fourth seat became vacant after the death of the sitting TMC MLA.

POLL TIME

State	Seats
West Bengal	4
Himachal Pradesh	3
Uttarakhand	2
Bihar	1
Tamil Nadu	1
Madhya Pradesh	1
Punjab	1

Stakes are high in Himachal Pradesh as election will be held in three seats — Dehra, Hamirpur and Nalagarh. It was necessitated after three independent MLAs joined the BJP. The BJP is going all out to win them though the Congress is in the majority with 38 MLAs while the BJP has 27. In Dehra, the Congress has fielded Kamlesh Thakur, wife of Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu, against BJP's Hoshiyar Singh, who switched sides.

The Vikravandi Assembly constituency in Tamil Nadu is also witnessing a fierce contest between the ruling DMK, NDA ally PMK, and NTK.

The two seats in Uttarakhand — Manglaur and Badrinath — hold significance to both the Congress and the BJP. The Badrinath seat fell vacant after the Congress MLA joined the BJP. The Congress has fielded Qazi Nizamuddin from Manglaur, a traditional Congress constituency.

While Bihar's Rupauli is witnessing a contest between the RJD and the JD(U), in Madhya Pradesh, the BJP is taking on the Congress in the tribal-dominated constituency of Amarwara.

Form task forces to fight dengue: CM instructs DCs

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Bengaluru

CHIEF Minister Siddaramaiah on Tuesday directed deputy commissioners to constitute task forces in their respective districts to combat dengue.

They should be on high alert for the next two months, the chief minister told DCs at a meeting here.

Siddaramaiah said DCs and health officials should ensure special wards to treat dengue patients in district hospitals. Similar arrangements should be made at medical colleges in the districts. Dengue tests should be increased and those infected with the disease should be monitored constantly. Teams should be formed to monitor the situation. Members of the teams should meet daily till monsoon ends, he told the officials.

The CM said there is no dearth of funds in the health department. In all, 7,362 dengue cases and seven deaths have been reported in the state so far. Currently, 303 people are being treated for dengue. However, experts have opined that there is no need to declare it as a medical emergency.

Siddaramaiah said approval has been given to start 215 "namma" clinics and buildings have been identified at 42 places. There are 503 such clinics in the state. Officials should inform people about the importance of these clinics.

'Garbage dumping rampant'

On the increasing number of dengue cases, Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar said dumping of garbage and construction debris is rampant in cities and towns. These spots have become mosquito-breeding centres as rainwater gets stagnated there.

"We will keep a watch on it. We have instructed officials to take strict action against the offenders. In Bengaluru, BBMP is working closely with the health department in combating dengue," he said.

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and DyCM DK Shivakumar at a meeting with deputy commissioners in Bengaluru on Tuesday | NAGARAJA GADEKAL

9,943 DEATHS IN 1 YR

Siddu pulls up babus for rising road accidents

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Bengaluru

EXPRESSING deep concern over the increasing number of deaths due to road accidents, Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Tuesday said nearly 10,000 people died in the state in the last one year.

Participating in a progress review meeting here, Siddaramaiah said identification of blackspots alone won't help, the officials should take measures to prevent accidents there.

In the last one year, the state witnessed 34,916 road accidents in which 9,943 people died, he said and sought to know if the officials' responsibility ended with the identification of blackspots where accidents occur frequently. Action will be taken against errant officials, he said.

'Ensure adequate ambulances'

Road safety committees should formulate plans to prevent accidents in their districts. Officials from Revenue and Police departments, and urban local bodies should work in tandem. Only then, road accidents could be prevented to an extent, Siddaramaiah said.

Stating that Road Safety Week should not be observed for the sake of it, the chief minister told the officials to ensure adequate ambulances and trauma centres to save accident victims.

UP govt suspends six officials after SIT report on Hathras stampede flags lapses

NAMITA BAJPAI @ Lucknow

THE Uttar Pradesh government on Tuesday suspended six officials, including a local sub-divisional magistrate (SDM), in connection with the July 2 stampede in Hathras during a *satsang* (prayer meeting), which claimed 121 lives. The action came soon after the special investigation team (SIT) submitted its report to UP Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, holding the event's organisers and the local administration responsible for the mishap.

The suspended officials are Sikdanararau SDM, circle officer, SHO Sikandrarau, tehsildar, and police outpost in charge of Kachora and Pora.

The SIT report recommended action against these officers saying they did not take the event seriously and also failed to inform higher officials.

It said the SDM granted permission without inspecting the venue or seeking the advice of higher authorities.

As for the event's organisers, the SIT report faulted them for understating the number of devotees who would be attending the event and also flouting conditions on which the approval was granted. It found that some members of the organising committee acted recklessly and misbehaved with local police. It also noted that the preacher, Bhole Baba, was allowed to meet the crowd without any security arrangement, which added to the chaos.

'Conspiracy angle can't be ruled out'

The SIT report said 'a big conspiracy' leading to the tragedy can't be ruled out, adding only a thorough probe can bring out the truth. Earlier, Bhole Baba's lawyer had claimed some people sprayed 'poisonous substance' into the crowd

Life convict walks out of prison with six degrees

RAKSHITH GOWDA @ Bengaluru

A 44-year-old man has earned four postgraduate degrees and two diploma degrees while serving life sentence in Bengaluru Central Prison.

Satish Kumar Gupta, former HR manager of an IT firm based in Bengaluru, was convicted by a city civil and sessions court in July 2017 for murdering his wife on August 10, 2010, in Hulimavu police limits.

Gupta, who was released prematurely on Tuesday along with 76 other prisoners for good conduct, said he wants to start a new life by taking up a job. He is also keen on offering legal advice to people and helping them draft documents pertaining to their cases. P3

Seventy-seven prisoners were released from prisons across the state on Tuesday

NEW ROLE

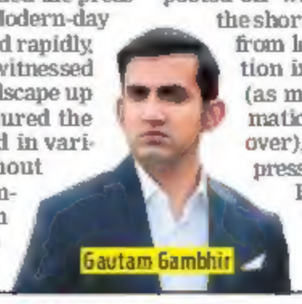
Gambhir appointed India team head coach

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Chennai

GAUTAM Gambhir has been appointed as the new head coach of the senior men's cricket team. The opener, who played the role of mentor during Kolkata Knight Riders' march to the Indian Premier League (IPL) title this year, will link up with the side for the first time during the white-ball series against Sri Lanka, which begins in three weeks.

Jay Shah, secretary of the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI), announced the appointment on X (formerly Twitter). "It is with immense pleasure that I welcome Mr @GautamGambhir as the new Head Coach of the Indian Cricket Team," Shah, whose post interestingly preceeded the press release, posted. "Modern-day cricket has evolved rapidly, and Gautam has witnessed this changing landscape up close. Having endured the grind and excelled in various roles throughout his career, I am confident that Gautam is the ideal person to steer Indian Cricket forward..." Having represented India with distinction in all three formats, the southpaw will be expected to build on the successes of the last regime, signposted off with global gold in the shortest format. Apart from leading the transition in red-ball cricket (as many as five automatic starters are 35 or over), he will be under pressure to deliver two ICC titles as early as next year (Champions Trophy followed by the WTC final, if India qualifies). The BCCI release said: "... his focus will be on developing a culture of excellence, discipline, and teamwork, while also nurturing young talent and preparing the team for future challenges on the global stage."

The 42-year-old will also be given carte blanche with respect to key support staff as the release thanked Paras Mhambrey (bowling coach), T Dilip (fielding coach) and Vikram Rathour (batting coach) for a 'highly successful tenure'.



EXPRESS READ

FIR against manager of Kohli co-owned hotel

Bengaluru: Police have registered FIRs against the managers of three restaurants, including One8 Commune co-owned by Indian cricketer Virat Kohli, for reportedly keeping their establishments open beyond permissible hours. P2

Sena leader's son held in Mumbai hit-and-run case

Mumbai: After being on the run for two days, Mihir Shah, son of Shiv Sena leader Rajesh Shah, and key accused in a hit-and-run accident at Worli in Mumbai on July 7, was arrested by Mumbai police on Tuesday. P10